THE DEMISE OF NATO: A MODEST PROPOSAL

"[Alliances] are only means by which the rulers of states precipitate the people into wars from which they benefit either by covering up their mistakes or by carrying out their plots against freedom."

– Marquis de Condorcet

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At this writing, no one can predict with certainty what the Soviet government will do about the 16-month-long defiance of the state by the Polish people, led by the labor union Solidarity and its spokesman, Lech Walesa. Sympathetic observers worry that the Soviets may intervene, but it appears that the crusty Soviet bureaucrats know very well the huge risks that would be entailed by an invasion of Poland.

These risks include not only the risk of getting bogged down in long, bloody street fights, but also the risk of a massive loss of prestige in the Third World, and of the final crack-up of the Warsaw Pact. The Russians cannot know what forces they would unleash in their own jurisdiction should they invade.

In the now typical fashion of the Reagan administration, the U.S. government has warned the Soviets that a Polish intervention would be a grave act, while at the same time doing and saying nearly everything possible to goad them into punishing the Polish. Even before his inauguration, Ronald Reagan and his troops began their bellicose vaunting, the most egregious case being Richard Pipes's warning that the U.S. would go to war if the Soviets didn't change their system. (This warning was later disavowed by the White House.)

Since then, Reagan, Secretary of State Alexander Haig, and Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger have continued to take opportunities to provoke the Russians. They have pressed the western European nations and Japan to increase military spending, and western Europe is being urged to accept 572 cruise and Pershing II missiles and the neutron bomb. This has had one good by-product: the spawning of a new peace movement in Europe, described by Jay Hilgartner elsewhere in this issue, a movement which has prompted Reagan national security adviser Richard Allen to denounce its "pacifist tendencies" and the "contemptible better-red-than-dead slogans of a generation ago."

The moves to establish warmer relations between the administration and China are also putting the Polish peo-

Secretary of State Alexander Haig, one of the administration's prime movers in the push to beef up NATO and provoke the Soviets.

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ple in jeopardy. The agreement to sell arms to China, plus the announcement that the U.S. and China jointly run a listening post near the Russian border, could do more to provoke a Russian invasion of Poland than anything Lech Walesa could do.

Nor has Reagan ameliorated the situation by proclaiming that the Russian empire is in its twilight, ready to fall of its own weight and, for that reason, deadlier than ever. This is not to suggest that the U.S. administration *wants* the Russians to roll into Warsaw, but rather to invoke the old maxim that in foreign policy, intentions and consequences are — as the experts would put it — asymmetrical.

The ironic conclusion — contrary to the establishment view — is that the American-West European alliance is increasing, not decreasing, Soviet temptations regarding Poland. The only thing that could induce the Russians to take the enormous risks of invasion is the fear that continued Polish liberalization would be the entree for a growing Western threat. Once this is understood, the policy prescriptions for taking the heat off Poland are far different from those of Ronald Reagan.

Russian discomfort with the Polish turbulence has great potential for instruction. That a system which pays homage to the rights of workers cannot bear the existence of a workers association independent of the state should teach people around the world that something is amiss with socialism. The problem is, the U.S. government seems intent on demonstrating that there is no alternative to meddling, bullying, exploitative states. What is there to inspire people to repudiate socialism if the alternative is what *they know as* "capitalism"; that is, U.S. imperialism?

And yet, there is a real alternative to such imperialism: a radical program of nonintervention in foreign and domestic policy — the free market applied worldwide in the time-honored tradition of Richard Cobden and John Bright. Such a policy would enable the so-called nonaligned nations to stop fearing U.S. hegemony and turn their wrath toward the Soviets when and if they encroach. This, in turn, would discourage the Soviets from adventurism, including perhaps an invasion of Poland. Until the U.S. adopts such a policy, members of the Third World and other countries will see friendship with the Soviet Union as a necessary counterweight to American encroachment.

Part of this program would be a U.S. pullout from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. There was a time when this would have been unthinkable, but no more. Articles rethinking the whole rationale of NATO have appeared in *Foreign Affairs, The Washington Monthly, The National Review,* and *The Wall Street Journal.* In a *Journal* article entitle "NATO at a Dead End," neoconservative Irving Kristol exposed the dismal failure of U.S. postwar European policy. The proposal for new theater nuclear forces was the occasion for the revelation: "Suddenly the peoples of Western Europe have awakened to the fact that Europe's position in the 'balance of terror' is way off center, that the new missiles simply guarantee that, given the absence of military parity at all levels, a conflict with the Soviet Union could have as its only *certain* outcome European annihilation."

The National Review — Bill Buckley's magazine — ran a guest editorial by John P. Roche last July entitled "Is NATO an Initiative Whose Time Has Passed?" While Roche argues the wrong case (he thinks the Europeans are ingrates when they object to nuclear missiles on their soil), he concludes that the American people are not served by the alliance.

The Polish situation and the ensuing general reassessment of Europe offer an important opportunity for a different slant on the matter. We must begin with a little history.

NATO was founded on April 4, 1949, under curious circumstances. In the aftermath of World War II, the United States was the only power left intact. The Soviet Union was weak and worried, having lost at least 20 million people during four years of fighting Germany. As everyone knows, the U.S. government was the only one with atomic weapons then and the only one ever to have used them in warfare. Since the Stalin government had been a U.S. ally during the war and largely cooperative as the war wound down, it is hard to see how the establishment of NATO could have been interpreted as a defensive measure, especially since the United Nations had been set up ostensibly to resolve international disputes. The U.S. decision to join a European alliance and to station troops in Europe — not to mention the decision to establish 400 bases around the Soviet Union by 1949 — could not help but frighten the historically paranoid Russians.

The Truman Doctrine is critical to the analysis, of course. Harry Truman made his famous Congressional speech on March 12, 1947, right after the British informed him that they could not afford to defend their interests in Greece and Turkey. Painting the world situation as a mortal contest between liberty and tyranny, Truman asked Congress to approve aid for the Greek and Turkish regimes in their battles against insurgents. He did not mention that Greece and Turkey were dictatorships and that holding up the British Empire was something less that a pro-liberty enterprise. Nor did he mention that Stalin opposed the Greek uprising. "[It] must be stopped, and as quickly as possible," Stalin had said. This was consistent with Stalin's conservatism and his wish not to antagonize the Allies.

The Truman Doctrine is usually explained as the U.S. reaction to Russian aggression in Eastern Europe. But the chronology does not support this. The doctrine was proclaimed two days *after* the opening of a critical meeting of

In 1949, even John Foster Dulles did not believe that the Soviets were planning military conquest.

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Allied foreign ministers in Moscow; the proclamation badly upset the meeting and set the stage for the next 30 years of mutual suspicion. Truman's doctrine was announced 10 months *after* the Russians withdrew their forces from Iran (followed by U.S. entry there via dollar diplomacy). The doctrine preceded the communist coup in Czechoslovakia by 11 months; this is the incident usually referred to as the Soviet instigation of the Cold War. Finally, Truman's declaration of Cold War came 17 months *before* Russia's blockade of Berlin.

Had Truman thought Stalin was behind the Greek uprising, it might have been arguable that the doctrine was in part a response to Russian meddling. But this fails as an explanation when one realizes that Truman thought up the idea long before the Greek episode. According to *New York Times* columnist Arthur Krock, a Truman intimate, Truman formulated the doctrine in 1945 and simply waited for the right time to announce it. Thus the Truman Doctrine—the opening shot in the Cold War that has shaped our world — is revealed as a tissue-thin pretense for U.S. dominance in Europe. Even George F. Kennan (who is sometimes credited for the doctrine because of the article he wrote on containment under the pseudonym of X in 1946) disapproved of the Truman Doctrine. In the light of all these facts, the conventional explanation for NATO appears somewhat swiss-cheese-like.

NATO's precursor, the Brussels Union of March 1948, is traditionally regarded as a response to the Czech communist coup and the blockade of Berlin. Yet some significant people believed this was inappropriate. As Kennan wrote in his memoirs:

> I regarded the anxieties of the Europeans as a little silly; this was not, it seemed to me, the time to start talking about military defense and preparations. . . . I must point out that both of the events that threw official Washington into such a dither — the consolidation of communist power in Czechoslovakia and the inauguration of the attempt by the Russians to force the Western allies out of Berlin—were defensive reactions on the Soviet side to the initial success of the Marshall Plan initiative and to the preparations now being undertaken on the Western side to set up a separate German government in Western Germany. [*Memoirs: 1925-1950*]

Kennan's observations were similar to that of Sen. Robert Taft, one of the few to refuse to be stampeded by Truman:

> I believe that the tone of the President's statement that his confidence in ultimate world peace has been shaken is unfortunate. . . . I myself know of no particular indication of Russian intentions to undertake military aggression beyond the sphere of influence which was originally assigned to the Russians. The situation in Czechoslovakia is indeed a tragic one; but the Russian influence has been predominant in Czechoslovakia since the end of the war. The Communists are merely consolidating their position in Czechoslovakia; but there has been no military aggression, since the end of the war. [Quoted in *Free World Colossus by David Horowitz*]

Taft was well aware of the Soviet concern with the western rim. Three times in the twentieth century Russia had been invaded through Eastern Europe, twice by Germany and once by *Poland* in 1920. (The Poles captured Moscow in the seventeenth century, initiating a long tradition of Russian distrust of the Poles.) But Stalin's fear did not immediately lead him to seek to absorb Eastern Europe. According to the late Yugoslav leader, Tito, Stalin merely wished to have weak and unhostile states on his border. In fact, his exacting harsh reparations from the Eastern Europeans and the attempted thwarting of Tito's independent course indicate that Stalin did not want Eastern Europe to be the rocks on which the wartime alliance would crash.

Tito was once quoted as saying that Stalin changed his mind about Eastern Europe *after* the Truman Doctrine was proclaimed because he feared U.S. interventionist dollar-diplomacy and because he believed he needed a "depth of defense zone" against U.S. planes bearing atom bombs.

Harry S. Truman, author of the Truman Doctrine, which set the stage for 30 years of U.S.-Soviet suspicion.

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Turning back to Yugoslavia for a moment, it is significant that, despite the bitterness between Tito and Stalin, the Soviets never invaded Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia had not been assigned to the Russians in the war settlement, but rather was designated as a buffer between the Russian and British spheres. Stalin's rebuffing of Tito and his support for the Yugoslav monarchy was another in a series of Russian efforts to placate the Allies.

In reading about this era, one cannot but be impressed by the *number* of important people who did not believe the Soviets were a military threat to anyone. As Kennan, head of Secretary of State Marshall's planning staff at the time, later wrote, "The Russians had no idea of using regular military strength against us." He believed in the "desirability of avoiding anything that could appear to the Soviet leaders as an aggressive encirclement of their country," but was ignored.

In 1948, U.S. Soviet specialist Charles Bohlen affirmed Kennan's view,

> The most dangerous period has been in the immediate postwar years, 1945-47, when the U.S. military establishment was rapidly disintegrating and the American public had not yet been alerted to the Russian peril; it is significant that the Soviet army did not move during that period. [Quoted in *Shattered Peace,* by Daniel Yergin]

Even John Foster Dulles, later the architect of "brinksmanship," added his voice to this chorus in 1949:

> So far as is humanly possible to judge, the Soviet government, under conditions now prevailing, does not contemplate the use of war as an instrument of its national policy. I do not know of any responsible official, military or civilian, in this government or any government, who believes that the Soviet government now plans conquest by open military aggression. [Quoted in *Free World Colossus*]

Dulles, Bohlen, Kennan, and Taft were not oddballs; their judgment was shared by more than six major American leaders, including James Forrestal and Gen. Walter Bedell Smith.

By 1950, Dulles repeated his view of Soviet intentions, but added a *caveat* that is particularly relevant to our day:

> While the Soviet government has no present intention of resorting to war as an instrument of national policy, nevertheless, it can be assumed that the Soviet state would use the Red Army if its leaders felt that their homeland was imminently and seriously threatened. [Quoted in *A Foreign Policy for Americans,* by Robert Taft]

This is precisely what U.S. postwar policy has made the Soviet leaders feel; this more than anything else explains the last three decades.

In light of this history, why was NATO formed? Perhaps the real reason was stated by Averill Harriman, former ambassador to the Soviet Union, when he said during the NATO debate that if the alliance were not formed "there would be a reorientation" in Europe, a "restrengthening of those that believe in appeasement and neutrality." This sounds much like Alexander Haig condemning European plans to build a natural-gas pipeline with the Soviets. Sen. Tom Connally also hinted at the time at the motives behind NATO. It is, he said, "but the logical extension of the principle of the Monroe Doctrine."

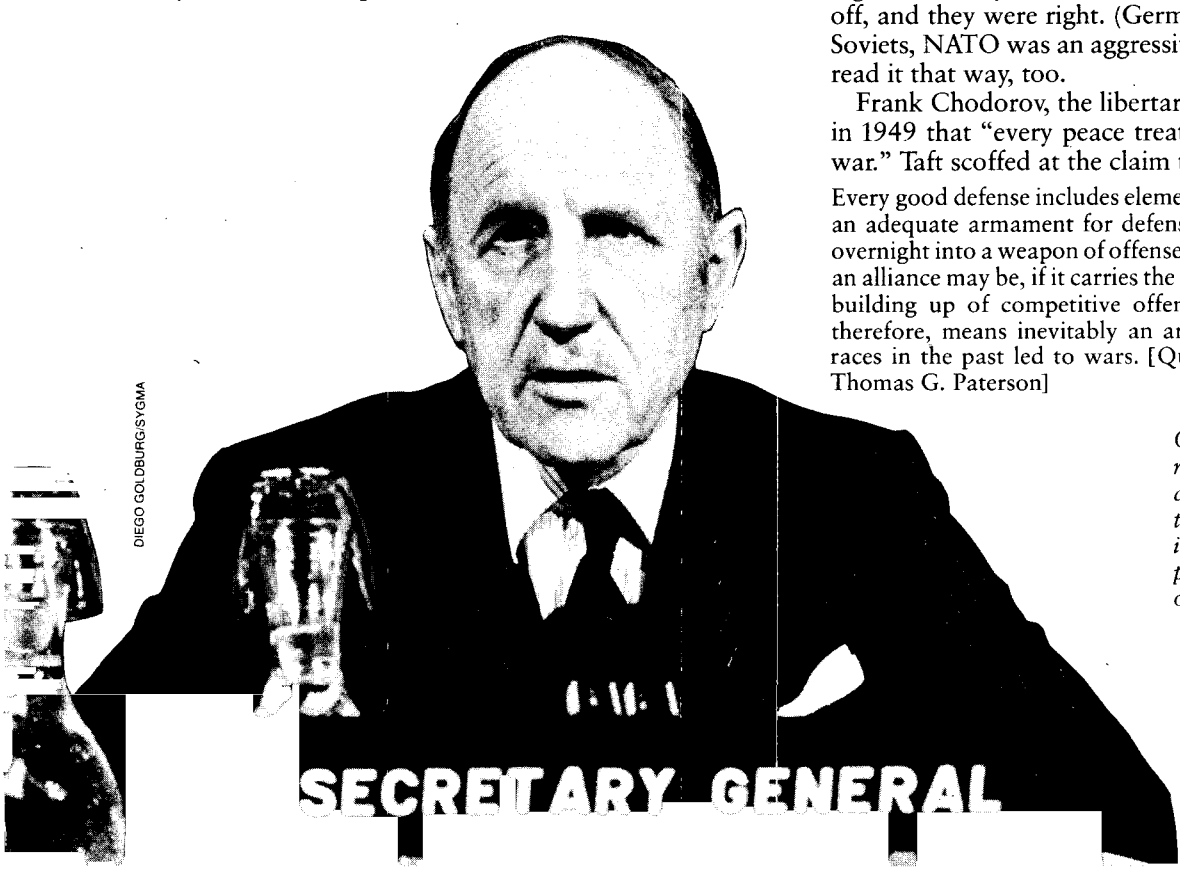
NATO established a drastically new role for the U.S. in world affairs, as Taft and others pointed out with alarm. For the first time, the U.S. was *pledged* to enter feuds in Europe. No doubt Truman and his aides believed it would be difficult to play world policemen were every European nation to make a separate peace with Russia and were there no tripwire to justify U.S. intervention.

Shortly after NATO's founding, a new rationalization was employed: U.S. foreign policy after the war centered on the atom bomb aimed at the Soviets. But there was a gap in the strategy because if the Soviets, fearing an atomic attack, pushed into Western Europe, the U.S. would have to drop the bomb there—or not drop it at all. NATO was expected to stop or slow down this move.

The Soviets, seeing the formation of NATO after the Marshall Plan and the consolidation of western Germany, couldn't help but smell a threat. They knew that the rearming of Germany and its admission to NATO couldn't be far off, and they were right. (Germany joined in 1955.) To the Soviets, NATO was an aggressive symbol. Some Americans read it that way, too.

Frank Chodorov, the libertarian writer and editor, noted in 1949 that "every peace treaty is an agreement to make war." Taft scoffed at the claim that NATO was defensive:

> Every good defense includes elements of offense. We cannot have an adequate armament for defense which cannot be converted overnight into a weapon of offense. . . .[N]o matter how defensive an alliance may be, if it carries the obligation to arm, it means the building up of competitive offensive armaments. This treaty, therefore, means inevitably an armament race, and armament races in the past led to wars. [Quoted in *Cold War Critics* by Thomas G. Paterson]



On September 30, NATO Secretary General Joseph Luns, criticized the Reagan administration for allowing the impression to grow that it "is preoccupied with the pursuit of military supremacy."

Taft stressed that NATO would be a self-fulfilling prophecy. "...It necessarily divides the world into two camps....This whole program is not a peace program; *it is a war program.*" (Emphasis added. Quoted in *Not to the Swift,* by Justus Doenecke)

Kennan, once again looking back, has aptly identified the tragedy of NATO:

> All these great objectives... the solution of the problem of German unification, the removal of the division of the continent generally, the reintegration of the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe into the European Community, and the development of European unity on a continental scale ... were sacrificed at a stroke to the erection of a military defense *against an attack no one was planning*.... So egregious a misplacement of emphasis could have proceeded, it seems to me, only from the minds of people... preoccupied with military problems to the detriment of all serious political thought. [Emphasis added. Quoted in *Free World Colossus*]

This historical journey is intended to show that the threat NATO represents to the Soviets is nothing new. Today, the only change is that the situation is worse. In the continued absence of a Soviet threat to Western Europe, the talk about rebuilding a U.S.-dominated NATO is dangerous. Even apart from this history, it makes no sense. "If western Europe were to coalesce," writes foreign policy analyst Earl Ravenal, "it would be the second most powerful entity in the world—more powerful than the Soviet Union, and in some respects more so than the United States." Western Europe has a larger population than the Warsaw Pact (400 million), "equivalent economic potential" ($2 trillion GNP), comparable military manpower, and British and French nuclear forces.

From the hysteria in the Reagan administration, one would never guess that NATO spent more than the Warsaw Pact nations each year of the 1970s. (1979: $212 billion for NATO [including U.S. spending], $175 billion for the Pact [including Soviet spending].) NATO will cost Americans $109 billion this year, and $2.45 trillion in the next decade, if Reagan's original appropriation requests are met.

But the case against U.S. involvement in NATO does *not* rest on Western European military or economic superiority. NATO is dangerous by its very nature. As Ravenal explains:

> More than thirty years after the formation of NATO, the defense of Western Europe still rests on the proposition that an American president will invite the destruction of U.S. cities and the incineration of 100 million citizens to repel a Soviet incursion or resist an ultimatum in Western Europe. That proposition cuts both ways. In one sense, America's war plan—never rejected by any president from Truman to Carter or by any secretary of defense from George Marshall to Harold Brown—is the first use of nuclear weapons, "if necessary," to defend Europe. Thus America threatens to turn local defeat into global holocaust. But in another sense, America's nuclear commitment is not so evident. ["Death Comes to the Arch Alliance," *Inquiry,* Oct 27, 1980]

On the dubious nature of the commitment, Ravenal quotes Henry Kissinger, who told a conference on NATO in 1979, "We must face the fact that it is absurd to base the strategy of the West on the credibility of the threat of mutual suicide."

In Ravenal's view, NATO is in hopeless disarray, a condition aggravated by U.S. pressure for European acceptance of land-based nuclear missiles. Understandably, many Europeans wish not to become a sponge in the warmongers' game. This is the final nail in NATO's coffin. The attempt to shift a prospective war to Europe is both cynical and foolish — cynical because of its inhumanity; foolish because it assumes that the Soviets will not retaliate against the U.S. if the missiles that are launched start from European soil.

Taft, Kennan, and the others stand vindicated. They warned us more than 30 years ago that by intensifying the threat to the Soviets, we threaten ourselves.

The ramifications for Poland should be obvious. The most the U.S. government can do to encourage Polish liberalization is to cease threatening the Soviet Union. No affirmative measure can achieve this. The injunction against intervention fits nicely with the entire libertarian analysis of activist foreign policy. As William Graham Sumner wrote, one cannot serve peace by preparing for war; one should decide what one wants—peace or war—and prepare for *it.*

Kennan, in his latest book, *The Cloud of Danger,* writes of the "congenital deficiencies of a government such as our own from the standpoint of the conduct of foreign policy." In other words, a government bound, to any extent, by considerations of freedom will not have the discretion and privacy necessary to foreign adventurism and imperialism. Despite Kennan's misplaced confidence in the U.S. government—as Garet Garrett once said, "The revolution *was*"—Kennan does get at something libertarians cannot emphasize too much: Liberty cannot exist in a garrison state. Peace and freedom demand withdrawal from NATO and other alliances and the full implementation of nonintervention. ❑

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Joseph Stalin: did his fear of the Truman Doctrine force him to absorb Eastern Europe?